

## Do we want teachers to teach?

*Preeti Mathew*

*The teacher should be given an opportunity to concentrate on teaching activities only.*

Increasingly we see teachers being entrusted with a lot of responsibilities other than what would be ideally expected. During my varied interactions with various cadres of functionaries and teachers from government primary schools in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand, there have been some questions that have dogged me persistently but as yet, remain unanswered. Do we really expect our teachers to teach?

### Single teacher schools

There are single teacher schools with varying number of student, say, 20-60 students or even more. These schools are smaller schools located in the fields or away from the main village habitation. In such schools, the teacher is responsible for a number of tasks. It may be still comfortable for a single teacher to teach students but they are definitely inadequate for all other sundry tasks in school. What is to be noted is that the same teacher who teaches is also expected to attend meetings, keep the records, ensure that the mid-day meal happens regularly, and also make regular visits to the parents. It comes as no surprise that what we have finally after all these functions, is a tired and apathetic teacher.

The question I raise here is - how much do we expect of our teachers?

### Recruitment of teachers

If the teacher is appointed to a school away from the location that he/she prefers, there is also a problem of adjustment and frustration. Hence the question arises that why is it that a teacher is not given a choice of their preferred location of work. A possible solution can be that the process of recruitment of teachers must be further decentralized to the block level. Those teachers who wish to apply in a particular block must apply to those only. There must be various positions to which they can apply: teachers - rural; teachers - urban, teacher - semi urban. There can be a better tally of the projected requirement of teachers. This tally would also ensure that it is balanced.

### Mid-day meal scheme

Mid-day meal as of today has taken a lot of time and effort of the teacher during school hours. The teachers, who are enthusiastic enough, spend a substantial portion of the time in ensuring that the meals are given on time and in required

quantity. Moreover, any need for the raw materials requires the teachers to buy them. This adds to the work of the teacher and takes away considerable time from the working hours. Obviously our expectations from a teacher are unreal, to say the least. But now that we are facing this situation, how do we deal with it? My suggestion is that the mid-day meal scheme must be taken out of the school premises and outsourced to local institutions. This would help save time to do better teaching. It will also add to space in the school premises as some part is occupied in mid-day meal material storage. This will also lessen the paper work done by schools.

### Support system to the school

Today out of the 240 working days in a year, some of the days are taken up in the enrollment drive, some in the trainings, some in the examination, some in the celebration of weeks or days to be celebrated by the school etc. We must have a record of how many days are *actually* given for teaching-learning to take place

Involving teachers in household surveys, health surveys, population census and elections directly hints that at present we have no human resource parallel to the teacher who we feel would be capable of doing such tasks. Again, this also supports the point that we are trying to get task done by teachers also because it cuts down on the cost of employing such a big force. But after all, this is at the cost of the teacher's time in school. Hence do we want the teachers to teach?

As a measure to help the schools, each school must have a community worker as a support to the teacher. The worker must have required qualifications to do so. But this in no way will substitute visits to parents that a teacher is supposed to do in the village.

Thus, I strongly advocate that each government school have a community worker, a support staff for administrative purposes and a helper. The rationale behind this is that then the teacher would be in a position to concentrate completely on teaching and related activities. This will help take the time out of administrative tasks in the school. Even if studies suggest that there is not much of administrative work, I view above suggestions in the light of making environment at school conducive for the teacher to teach.

*Preeti Mathew is State Coordinator, Learning Guarantee Program - Gujarat, Azim Premji Foundation.*